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ABSTRACT

Considering today's ever-increasing multicultural classroom environment, English teacher preparation programs at the doctoral level should revamp their curricula with regard for this diversity. New teacher education programs, such as the one presently being offered at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, are providing the impetus for new ways of looking at classroom issues. One component of the program is the initial requirement of two units of literary theory for incoming doctoral students, the aim of which, besides orienting students to historical modes of criticism, is to re-orient students to a multicultural teaching environment. The second component is a new course entitled "Teaching College Literature." This course seeks to raise some important questions and investigate the tacit assumptions underlying the standard approaches and curricula. An example of course topics is the issue of class observation, with emphasis on why this standard procedure is useful and how it should be viewed, aided theoretically by selections from the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. Generally, readings for the course were varied, and participants discussed a wide range of issues, with the objective of articulating their intentions as future and current practitioners in the field. The course also utilized a practical, "hands-on" approach by modeling classroom activities. Problems of textbook selection, writing syllabi, developing a vita, and finding a job were broached. In short, such a practical, "nuts and bolts" approach is just what current graduate students need. (RS)

The Need for Self-consciousness in Theorizing and Teaching: The Role of the New Teacher Preparation Programs in Graduate Studies of the 90s

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The Need for Self-consciousness in Theorizing and Teaching: The Role of the New Teacher Preparation Programs in Graduate Studies of the 90s

With an awareness of the ever-increasing multicultural classroom environment in which the new Ph.D. will find herself, teacher preparation programs at the doctoral level are taking a second look at the curriculum with an eye to preparing English educators for this very real-world diversity. The new teacher education programs are not so much touting skills and techniques, as they are providing the impetus for new ways of looking at and thinking about classroom issues. Such a course of study is presently being offered in the Literature and Criticism program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and in this paper I intend to share with you information about two key components of that program.

One component of the program at IUP is the initial requirement of two units of theory for incoming doctoral students. The first unit, EN 751, treats literary theory from its inception in classical antiquity up until the modern structuralist movement. The second, EN 752, considers recent developments in literary theory which have contributed so richly to the foment about the "canon." These courses are offered to graduate students, not that they should become slaves to theory or slavish adherents to some "camp," but that they should develop the critical acumen necessary for addressing such important issues that impact the classroom, as the

previously mentioned canon and its formation, and the questions of age, gender, race, and ethnic identity as they relate to educational practice. By grounding classroom practice in theory, it is hoped that doctoral students will become more self-reflexive as practitioners and will develop a greater respect for, and appreciation and understanding of the divergent, as well as convergent, values and orientations of others--which, in turn, will help promote humanistic values within the classroom and, most importantly, beyond. Two units of theory, then, is the first major component of the program aimed at providing the necessary reorientation to a multicultural teaching environment.

The second component of the program which holds forth great promise for effecting additional change, and attempts to put theory into practice, is the just implemented in the fall of 1991 course, "Teaching College Literature." Novel even as practicums go due to its theoretical orientation--how many colleges or universities do you know that offer courses in teaching literature? As the course description puts it: "we will learn about becoming philosophical and theoretical in relation to practice and about becoming practical in relation to philosophy and theory" (*Graduate Newsletter* 8). Rather than being a hodgepodge of methods, no matter how systematically applied, this course seeks to raise some very important questions and investigate some of the tacit assumptions that underlie the standard English

curriculum. Such questions and investigations extend to how, what, and why we observe classroom practice? what models of classroom practice should practitioners adopt in light of the cultural diversity, varied ethnicity, racial plurality, and differences in age experienced in the present-day classroom? and how might we best affirm our students by privileging humanistic values in the multicutural classroom?

One of the tacit assumptions that the course "Teaching College Literature" investigated is why we observe classroom practice. The traditional notion is that we observe classroom practice in order to evaluate performance. However, within the context of "Teaching College Literature" students were encouraged to observe classroom practice with an eye to improving their own pedagogy, by learning from others, and to help others in becoming more self-reflexive about their practice. The phenomenology of Edmund Husserl was used to theoretically frame and bracket this process.

Students in the class read selected portions of material from Husserl's philosophy and applied it to classroom observation. They, in effect, developed their own philosophy of observation from a subjective and descriptive standpoint, making actual classroom observations; sharing any previous experience with classroom observation, whether it be as an observer or observee, positive or negative; and offering practical suggestions about humanizing the observation process via a class-complied

collaborative project--a narrative which recounted in book form all they had learned about teaching literature and the observation process through the class experience and activities.

Readings for the course were varied and ranged from an examination of observation instruments to a consideration of enlightened pedagogy to the development of an appreciation for the rights and responsibilities of practitioners as teachers and intellectuals toward other human beings, whether they be students or fellow practitioners. Titles included: Peter Elbow, *Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching;* Susan Gabriel and Isaiah Smithson, eds., *Gender in the Classroom;* Henry Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals: Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Learning;* Charles Moran and Elizabeth Penfield, eds., *Conversations: Critical Theory and the Teaching of Literature;* and, finally, *Practicing Theory in Introductory College Literature Courses,* edited by James Cahalan and David Downing of IUP. The major aim of these readings was to articulate our intentions as practitioners fully and to assist in developing a system of values that truly reflects concern with human beings in their particularity--that is--with a heightened appreciation of their needs, desires, and unique concerns--whether of a cultural, racial, sexual, or ethnic nature. Moreover, emphasis was placed on "making meaning with other people" as meaning is derived

and construed socially and democratically, to quote the course instructor, Dr. Mark Hurlbert.

Another important feature of the course "Teaching College Literature" was its practical, "hands-on" approach. Every effort was made to model classroom behavior and provide students liberatory classroom activities which they might adapt to the particular needs of their future classroom circumstances. For instance, a poem entitled "The Blake Mistake" by Sandi Castle was brought into the classroom and students counted off in fives' and formed groups to do collaborative interpretations of the piece. Rather than strictly come up with a discussion of its surface features and "meaning," each group of students came up with a "reading" of the poem, and there was a marvelous diversity of readings among the groups. The students got to "do" literature, rather than go through an arduous process of attempting to second guess the teacher about the "correct" interpretation.

A second in-class exercise further underscored the practical nature of the course. Jim Gustafson's poem "The Idea of Detroit" was used as the basis for an exercise in applying what students had learned from reading the various selections in *Practicing Theory in Introductory College Literature Courses*. Again groups were used to emphasize a collaborative classroom, rather than a competitive one, and the object was to apply one of the theoretical perspectives in the collection to the poem. The groups were

then to come up with some sort of reading based on their selected perspectives, and they were also to suggest possibly how they might individually teach "The Idea of Detroit." Subjectivist, reader-response, Marxist, feminist, and constructivist interpretations were among those selected to frame the piece. Suggestions for teaching the poem ranged from including it as a unit on works about cities, comparing or contrasting it with other poems on cities, using it as an example to launch a class time devoted to writing about cities, and employing it to foreground a discussion on urgent urban issues.

The final aspect of the class I wish to discuss is a very practical, and an almost traditionally totally ignored one: "nuts-and-bolts." What comes under the rubric of "nuts-and-bolts"? Selecting a textbook, for one; just knowing what's out there and how to evaluate them once you find them. Second, putting together a vita and applying and interviewing for a job. Third, theorizing and making a syllabus for a literature course in light of what had been learned in class and from looking at actual examples of syllabi.

All of this constitutes the "lore" of the profession. But unless you have someone to take you under their professional wing, many times you are "just out of luck," or have to "learn the hard way." The course "Teaching College Literature" sought to eliminate the problem of the "haves" and the "have nots" in as many ways as possible. And it strove to provide coursework in

which practitioners might learn to become as self-reflexive and as flexible as possible, so that we might all get on with the real work of participatory democracy: giving voice to the diversity that will keep us free and alive.

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